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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000922

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SUBJECT: TFH01: ARIAS MEDIATION

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Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On the evening of September 16, President Arias briefed the Ambassador on the results of his meetings with the Presidential candidates in San Jose. Overall, Arias believes these meetings were positive and resulted in the issuance of a public statement by four of the five candidates that expressed support for Arias' mediation and called for continued dialogue to achieve a final agreement under the San Jose process. Democratic Unification candidate Cesar Ham refused to sign the agreement arguing that the draft statement was not strong enough since it failed to demand that both parties immediately sign the San Jose Accord. The Ambassador and Arias agreed to follow-up and continue to work the candidates' initiative. End Summary.

¶2. (C) President Arias and the Ambassador spoke on the evening of September 16 to discuss the results of the visit of the Presidential candidates to San Jose, Costa Rica. Arias said that overall the five hour lunch discussion and afternoon meeting had gone well and progress had been achieved. He confirmed that the meeting had included five of the six presidential candidates including Pepe Lobo (National Party), Elvin Santos (Liberal Party), Bernard Martinez (PINU), Felicito Avila (Christian Democratic Party), and Cesar Ham (Democratic Unification Party). (Note: Lobo, Santos, Martinez and Avila all flew together from Tegucigalpa in a private plane provided by business leader, Miguel Facusse. Ham, one of two hard left candidates, agreed to participate at the very last minute following a call from the Ambassador to President Zelaya who urged him to be present at the meeting. The other candidate, Popular Bloc candidate Carlos H. Reyes, said he was unable to travel to San Jose citing injuries he received at the hands of the national police during a demonstration in August. End Note) Arias said that the four establishment candidates initially came in with a well rehearsed position urging international support for the Honduran elections as key to a solution to the nation's crisis. All four called for a national dialogue but also expressed strong fears of violence and instability if President Zelaya returned to Honduras. Arias engaged the candidates in a lengthy and detailed dialogue about the San Jose process and defended the entire 12 article Accord as a well conceived and reasoned proposal that fully took into consideration the concerns of all sides. Arias also told the candidates that if the San Jose Accord was not signed he

doubted whether the international community would support the elections process or recognize the results. Arias also predicted that if power was transferred from the de facto regime on January 27, 2010, the new president and government would face serious legitimacy problems and that many nations would not recognize the new leadership. He said that few nations would be willing to provide development assistance and financial backing to the new government. Arias said he asked the candidates who would want to lead a poor country like Honduras without international diplomatic support and economic assistance.

13. (C) Arias said that the meeting achieved a breakthrough when Elvin Santos affirmed his support for the signing of the San Jose Accord and the return of President Zelaya to Honduras. Arias noted that this seemed to surprise the others, but it prompted Bernard Martinez to also move in the direction of support for San Jose. Following intense discussion and exchanges both Lobo and Avila, despite concerns, expressed support for Arias' mediation effort under the San Jose process and said they would back an agreement signed by both sides. Throughout the discussion, Ham was strongly supportive of concluding San Jose immediately. The five candidates agreed to approach Micheletti and urge him to go back to San Jose and try to close the deal. It was not clear whether the candidates agreed to approach Micheletti as a group, or speak to him separately. Arias urged the candidates to sign a joint statement for issuance to the press that would state unequivocally that they supported the San Jose process and the conclusion of the Accord. Arias believes that all of the candidates were willing to sign the draft statement, but that Pepe Lobo's advisors (First Designate Maria Anoineta Bogran and Tegucigalpa Mayor Ricardo Alvarez) counseled Lobo that it was not the candidates' role to urge Micheletti and Zelaya to sign. In the end four of

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the five candidates agreed to issue a modified statement that was less committal but expressed support for Arias' mediation, urged dialogue and affirmed that the San Jose process was a viable mechanism for the solution of the Honduran crisis. (Note: The Ambassador had provided Arias a draft statement, which he supported but was modified by Lobo). End Note)

14. (C) Arias thanked the U.S. for its help in Tegucigalpa and Washington on behalf of the candidates' initiative. The Ambassador said we would continue to work this approach and that he would reach out to the candidates and others in Honduras in support of his mediation. The Ambassador also suggested that he consider approaching Latin American leaders, such as Presidents Calderon, Martinelli, Bachelet, Garcia and others, to call the candidates and urge them to approach the regime collectively and press for the signing of the agreement. Arias liked the ideas and said he would discuss the proposal with Foreign Minister Bruno Stagno.
LLORENS